

Report

New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route

■ 1.0 Site Description



The New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route (NJCHTR) was established in 1988 “to provide for public appreciation, education, understanding, and enjoyment” of significant natural and cultural sites associated with the coastal area of New Jersey. It encompasses the area east of the Garden State Parkway from the Raritan Bay south to Cape May and the area north and west of Cape May south of Route 49 to the vicinity of Deepwater near the Delaware Memorial Bridge. The NJCHTR is divided into five regions linked by the common heritage of life on the Jersey Shore and Raritan and Delaware bays: Sandy Hook, Barnegat, Absecon, Cape May, and the Delsea Regions. Five themes define different aspects of coastal life: maritime history, coastal habitats, wildlife migration, historic settlements, and relaxation and inspiration. The Maritime History, Coastal Habitats, and Wildlife Migration theme trails are open to the public. The Historic Settlements and Relaxation and Inspiration themes are still under development. The Trail Route functions as a travel route which interpretively connects a series of attractions consistent with the defined themes. The primary function of the route is to provide information on attractions along the coast and direction to these destinations, encouraging self exploration. All of the trail regional welcome centers, information centers, sites and points of interest, are in facilities managed and staffed by the trail partners and not by the NPS. The NPS owns and operates only one of the many attractions or destinations along the NJCHTR.

There are also various regional welcome centers and information centers along the trail which provide information about the NJCHTR but are also not staffed or operated by the

NPS. These centers generally have visitor parking areas, rest rooms, and water fountains. Most points of interest are unstaffed and have minimal facilities. Most sites provide the basic visitor facilities.

Because the function of the NJCHTR is to facilitate visitation to other non-NPS facilities, visitor statistics are not collected.

Figure 1 shows the location of the five NJCHTR regions. It should be noted that this map was obtained from a Web site which not maintained by the NPS and the Trail Superintendent indicated that there may be some inaccuracies. For example, there is no Welcome Center in the Sandy Hook Region at the present time.

Figure 1. Map of NJCHTR Regions



■ 2.0 Existing ATS

The NJCHTR is designed primarily as a vehicular tourism route in which interpretive themes link destinations throughout the trail area. Although some public transportation services exist along various portions of the trail, these services are not designed to support tourism along the trail or to its adjacent sites and attractions. Such services include bus tours to Atlantic City casinos. Most travel along the NJCHTR is by private automobile, although there has been increasing bicycle use in certain areas of the trail. However, there are no specifically designated bicycle routes or trails along the NJCHTR at this time.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Due to the unusual nature of the NJCHTR, specific Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) needs are not easily defined. Because much of the route follows major arterial roadways which are frequently congested, alternative routes, particularly along scenic byways would be appropriate. However, this would require a comprehensive wayfinding and signage program which currently does not exist. Wayfinding consists of limited signage to specific destinations from the nearest main intersection. Posting of these signs is under the jurisdiction of local authorities. There is a consistent signage program for the overall trail, although the Superintendent questions its effectiveness. Existing signs do not utilize the standard NPS format and logo but do follow the MUTCD standards for recreation signs.

There is also a need to facilitate bicycle travel along the trail. Opportunities for bike routes and trails have been discussed with the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT), although no specific actions have yet been undertaken. Such actions could include a widening or redesign of roadway shoulders to accommodate bicyclists as part of any roadway reconstruction program. However, NJDOT has cited concern over potential liability as a rationale for not pursuing bicycle facility development.

■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

The absence of any specific NPS facilities or destinations along the NJCHTR minimizes the apparent need for ATS. Given that the existence of the NJCHTR is primarily a means of increasing the visibility of attractions owned and operated by other entities along the New Jersey coast presumes that these other entities should be taking the lead for identifying and providing any ATS services. However, the staff of the NJCHTR did identify two related opportunities which would potentially enhance the visitor experience and visitor opportunities along the trail:

- An improved, comprehensive wayfinding/signage program utilizing a consistent and readily recognizable format can increase the visibility of the NJCHTR and help facilitate accurate routing. However it was also noted that there is a proliferation of signage already in place along the trail and improved signage needs to provide useful information and not add to the existing clutter. Of particular benefit would be signage to scenic byways which avoid more heavily congested major arterials.
- Bicycle use has increased significantly in the trail area in recent years. However, the NJDOT has not been proactive in facilitating the development of bike trails and bike routes, despite increasing demand. Such facilities would provide increased recreational opportunities for visitors/tourists along the trail and also provide an alternative to private vehicle use as a means of accessing adjacent attractions.

■ 5.0 Persons Interviewed

Janet C. Wolf, Superintendent, NJCHTR